

# Capabilities-Based Planning in the Coming Global Security Environment

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# **Capabilities-Based Planning in the Coming Global Security Environment**

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## **Introduction**

Capabilities-based planning as a desirable approach (but to what end? This will be discussed later...) has come up because the Cold War ended and the U.S. had no enemies to match us or for us to match them, as we strove to do with the Soviet Union. Of course, it's nearly 15 years since the Berlin Wall fell, and nearly 13 years since the Soviet Union finally collapsed (it had been collapsing for around 10 years before that final collapse, but we were not allowed to notice; DOD is a very prudent organization). One wonders why it took DOD so long to try to think in another direction. The inertia of minds, legacy forces, and legacy methods probably had something to do with it. But then the question arises, as discussed below, whether capabilities-based planning itself is just another manifestation of inertia. I think as currently approached it may be. The opportunity for longer-range planning for a real world may have come with 9/11 and the huge shocks that the U.S. has experienced with the occupation of Iraq. If DOD is to truly address this changed world, however, it may no longer be called capabilities-based planning. We will see.

## **A definition**

My own simple-minded approach to capabilities-based planning is that it is enemy-less and threat-less. This essentially means that it is a means to maintain U.S. forces (I have not tried to apply it to other countries). Colin Powell's Base Force in 1990 was essentially capabilities-based, meant to reduce the forces by one-third after the Cold War, but also to those reductions on a downward glidepath so as not to let down the volunteers who constituted U.S. military personnel. When Les Aspin became Secretary of Defense in 1993, he instituted the Bottom-Up Review (BUR), intending to put a floor on force reductions. But he gave the job to RAND people and they reintroduced scenarios, as two Major Regional Conflicts (MRCs), which quickly focused on Iraq and North Korea because that was what the RAND people gamed—thus saving their old Cold War analytical capabilities. MRCs became MTWs (Major Theater Warfare) and later MCOs (Major Combat Operations). But under level and stagnant budgets, the notion of capabilities-based planning began to surface, without scenarios. When the approach and term first surfaced, back around 1998, I heard one sensible thinker note that, "The U.S. has the best navy it ever had, and the best navy in the world." He then went on to propose that new systems demonstrate marginal improvements to that base. If they didn't, or didn't add much, they would lose out in competition to those that did. "Analysis" to handle these marginal improvements to existing capabilities would not be too hard.

## **The paradoxes of analysis**

But “analysis” suffers from what might be called “the curse of McNamara,” who saw the need for much more analytical support for new systems proposed (note the continued emphasis on “new systems”), though as his chief analyst, Alain Enthoven explained, judgment would never be eliminated, but the areas of the unknown to which judgment would have to be applied could be made much narrower if analysis covered much more of the problem. But the curse of McNamara persists with the Congress, which tends to demand—or we fear it will demand—elaborate supporting analyses for any proposals. This can lead to “paralysis by analysis,” as we all know. At its narrowest, though, we do need operational test and evaluation (OT&E) to have some assurance that systems work.

Capabilities-based analysis apparently is meant to focus on programs out into the future—which in turn means acquisitions, of new systems, with an emphasis on technology, and things that can be measured. In its reaching out into the future, and in an almost timeless way, this is still a reflection of the Cold War competition with the Soviets, a competition that seemed interminable and, as time went on, not actually ever involving combat.

What about “force structure,” meaning number of platforms, units, and the manpower associated with them? One aspect of force planning that characterized the Cold War was that the U.S. despaired of ever matching the Soviets in numbers, and so we traded quality for quantity. But with rising sophistication and rising costs, we got even further behind in numbers, lending more despair to our efforts. A variation of this has appeared after the Cold War as the capabilities of platforms got so much better—like precision strikes with PGMs by aircraft and even UAVs—that the U.S. could fight with even fewer platforms. The Chief of Naval Operations talks that way these days as he realizes he simply can’t replace older platforms one-for-one under constrained budgets. The metrics for such trade-offs are fairly simple to do, but it is not yet clear they drive DOD programming. Instead, they may be offered as post-hoc rationalizations for what the program ended up with.

Nonetheless, without the Soviet Union with which to compare U.S. forces, American forces, defense budgets, acquisitions, research and development, and, especially battle experience, are far superior to those of any other country in the world, or even any combination of countries—since, by at least one measure, the U.S. spends 51 percent of the total of world defense budgets. This privileged position arises because (1) the U.S. is a wealthy country and a strong defense is rooted deeply in its internal politics, and (2) defense efforts have shrunk in most of the rest of the world. China might be on an upswing, but they start from a low base. This privileged position the U.S. enjoys should also support a reflexive capabilities-based planning approach to programming. That is to say, DOD need measure only against itself, thinking of ways to do better off its existing base.

## Capabilities-based planning in DOD today

However, capabilities-based planning as it has initially emerged in DOD today is to a large extent based on the injunction by Rumsfeld (and I am paraphrasing), “We don’t know who we’ll be fighting in the future, but we know how they’ll fight.” I submit this is nonsense. It is, of course, illogical. But it also feeds off the line that the easy availability of commercial technologies in the global economy means that anyone, from terrorist cells (like the Moroccans in Spain) up through a rogue country, can have some kind of super capability, cheaply, in one-third the time it takes the U.S. to field a new capability. And it would work, without testing and training.

This kind of fear among people in the U.S. has been growing since the end of the Cold War and the loss of Soviet super capabilities, but where is the evidence of such progress out there in the world? Those countries, e.g., the rogues, that may want new technologies are usually in desperate economic shape. Those countries that are prosperous, having been able to join the global economy, have better things to spend their money on. Norman Friedman, for instance, has noted that the acquisition of cruise missiles (all anti-ship) by countries is minimal and that the companies building them are going out of business.<sup>1</sup> China is greatly interested in making all these technological advances, but it is not the enemy of the United States and what it is buying from Russia represents technologies of the 1970s and 1980s—in numbers so far comparable to what the U.S. and France have sold to Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it is not enough to buy capabilities. There is also the question of personnel, training, integration of systems into the forces, and command—not to speak of testing in combat experience (which only the United States seems to have gotten). Those of us who have worked security assistance programs have some good stories to tell.

The insurgency in Iraq that the U.S. has been facing is another matter. Secretary Rumsfeld seems not to have anticipated that an insurgency would arise and how those insurgents are fighting. If he had “known how they would fight,” maybe he would have listened to General Shinseki. After all, didn’t he say, “We don’t know who we’ll be fighting, but we know how they’ll fight”? But it is that very insurgency, as well as the unpredictable terrorist attacks elsewhere, that poses the challenges to U.S. forces in the future, as I will be discussing. That is a matter of operations and actual war-fighting, rather than programming for the future. It is not yet clear how capabilities-based planning would be applicable to real operating environments, as opposed to programming for the future.

However, the result in DOD for capabilities-based planning so far is that the programmers are inventing enemies and giving them the usual perfect forces, just as Soviet forces were perfect (except that the Soviets didn’t know how to train and maintain them), and then fighting them in scenarios. The trouble with scenarios in DOD, from my nearly 40 years of watching them, is that you are supposed to lose in them, so that you can be motivated to transform the forces or to beg for more money, or simply to protect what you have against feared cuts by

an insensitive Congress. If one scenario doesn't produce these results, then the scenarios are multiplied, including "near-simultaneous" ones, regardless of any history. If you turn out to be able to handle even multiple scenarios, then you multiply all sorts of "military operations other than war," giving yourself huge problems of assembling forces that have been dispersed to all distant points in the world by U.S. administrations that have shown an unprecedented sympathy for humanitarian situations.<sup>2</sup> What follows is a desperate time scramble to get to the real war, leading to lift "requirements" impossible to fulfill.

### **The problem of force structure within capabilities-based planning**

At the very practical level of maintaining and improving U.S. military capabilities, as a programming matter for the future, the simple approach of incrementally improving the forces seems best, rather than the creation of "stressing" scenarios that are nearly pure inventions, pure works of imagination. This does not solve the problem of determining force structure numbers—but it may never have done so in the past anyway. The history of how the United States got to the force structure numbers it did over time would be an interesting one, but it probably wouldn't reveal much about analysis. McNamara never really solved the General Purpose Forces structure problem in his Draft Presidential Memoranda.

The history would probably reveal that the U.S. always would choose capability (quality) over quantity, though "quality" usually means technological advances. The U.S. defense community lives in fear of the next *Sputnik*. But if there were a main determinant of the size of U.S. forces, it would probably be most strongly correlated with the deficit that any administration thought it could tolerate. In other words, the top line of the defense budget was determined by the administration and passed to the Secretary of Defense, who then told the Services to fit the forces to the budget—but without cheating (i.e., not to undercost new acquisitions and to ensure that the forces bought were manned, maintained, trained, and supplied). That was what the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) was all about, but it probably can't have been described as "capabilities-based planning." Big current operations—wars, as in Vietnam and now in Iraq—could greatly add to the topline and disrupt PPBS, but have also not been something lending itself to capabilities-based planning since it was existing forces and capabilities that were to be used up. At the moment, we can only use what we have, not what it is to be delivered five years hence.

### **Planning for the new world situation**

How, then, might capabilities-based planning be applied to the new, and real, world situation? On behalf of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) in connection with their Global Trends 2020 project, The CNA Corporation conducted a conference on the "changing nature of warfare" on 25-26 May 2004.<sup>3</sup> The general conclusions and projections out to 2020 of the participants at the

conference may be summarized as follows:

- State-on-state conflicts have just about disappeared, except for the Americans exercising their preemption strategy.
- Internal conflicts have shown a steep decline from a high around 1990-1991, but will not disappear. The type of warfare in internal conflicts is most often characterized as “insurgency.”
- Terror will be the main threat for years to come, both local and global and at least locally can also be characterized as insurgency.
- But there is the off-chance that, with the rise of China, classic balance of power situations, arms races, confrontations, and even conflicts could rise in East Asia, especially since there are not the mitigating institutions of consultation and transparency there to which Europe has become accustomed.
- The advanced world countries are in conflict within themselves about whether they should follow the American lead in “transformation,” with expeditionary capabilities, net-centric coordination, precision strike, etc., vs. gearing up instead for peacekeeping, peace enforcement, constabulary, and stabilization operations in low-tech situations—with their emphasis on ground forces.

The participants at the conference had trouble thinking out to 2020 because they were so bogged down in discussion about coping with the insurgency now in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Afghanistan.

On the basis of these kind of projections, what might capabilities- based planning be directed to in the future?

- There is the immediate problem of defending against the insurgency in Iraq. This has led to many small improvements, some of which are technically difficult, like detection of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).
- At the next level up, the U.S. was obviously caught short in planning for “stabilization operations,” with their combination of fighting insurgency and restoring a devastated country. The most significant lack of capability has been language. Does much more language and cultural training, and the organizations to support them, count as “capabilities-based planning”?
- Then we turn to the global war on terror, where capabilities-based planning breaks into two parts, maybe three:
  - U.S. homeland defense, with all the complexities of air, maritime, and border interceptions, tracking of individuals, detections of explosives and other hazardous materials, including radiological,

and consequence management. This is an interagency and interstate matter, in which DOD plays only a part.

- Tracking down terrorists around the world before they strike, setting up coordinated international and interagency efforts to identify individuals and to cut off their financing and their movement, and standing ready to conduct raids, especially with Special Forces, to take out terrorists.<sup>4</sup>
- And, as a third possibility, strikes by joint forces into countries that turn out to be harboring terrorists or in which terrorists might set up remote training camps.
- Finally, maintaining a hedge against a non-peacefully rising China, with offsetting and dissuasive capabilities and capabilities to defend Taiwan.

What does this view of conflict in the future mean for defense planning? Does “capabilities-based planning” apply? In particular, how would one apply capabilities-based planning to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)? There are several alternatives:

- Suppose GWOT were the only war left for the U.S., what would U.S. forces look like? (The zero-based approach...)
- What if GWOT were to be done just on the margin and would not require a major increase in resources?
- What among Legacy Forces (and programs) could be stripped to really free up lots more resources for GWOT?
- What of future forces are not applicable to GWOT and could be either stopped or reduced in quantity?

The global war on terror is going to require a persistent effort for years to come. It is compared to the Cold War as “a protracted conflict.” It is said that it is not a war to simply win (implying that DOD could put together a plan for “winning”), but in which the U.S. and the rest of the world must simply outlast the terrorists.

The most challenging task would be to “drain the swamp” so as to “eliminate the breeding grounds,” i.e., reform essentially the whole Islamic world. At the same time, the terrorists, as represented and symbolized by al Qaeda, are only a small minority of 1.4 Muslims in the world (a rough number). And we’re hardly sure what “reforming the Muslim world” might mean. Some say it is helping them to make better connections to the globalizing world.

The tasks for DOD run across the spectrum from contributing to homeland defense to Special Forces raids to catch specifically identified terrorists.

Unless there were another truly catastrophic incident in the U.S. that caused an administration to shift far more DOD resources into homeland defense, including



patrolling the maritime approaches, it may be that chasing down the terrorists might be done at the margin, with existing capabilities, but tied in to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) networks in efficient, task-directed ways. “Patrolling the “whole world,” or stationing Special Forces and Marines in remote places like Djibouti or Mali may not be efficient (it is not yet clear that the 1,800 personnel constituting the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa—CJTF HOA—has much to do). Interagency and international coordination would seem to be important.

At another extreme, if a new harboring state were found, and if DOD were assigned to occupy the country and root out the terrorist organizations, the experience, lessons learned, and capabilities brought to bear in Afghanistan and Iraq would be relevant. We already see the costs in ground force personnel, armored vehicles, training and cooperation with local ground forces, etc. A real forthcoming task for DOD may be what more exotic systems—F-22 is the favorite candidate, or even CVN-21—might be deferred or cut back in numbers to pay for more ground forces.

The continuing costs of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq are already putting a squeeze on programs, but perhaps in an incremental and accidental way. Moreover, deficit politics in the U.S. are likely to level out the DOD budget (though not necessarily reduce it). In short, it is not yet clear that the GWOT is central to DOD planning. And sometimes it appears instead that China as the new Soviet Union is. These are unresolved issues.

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1. Norman Friedman, “Globalization of Antiaccess Strategies?” in Sam J. Tangredi, ed., *Globalization and Maritime Power* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2002), pp. 487-502.

2. Around 1999, I counted 37 countries that had experienced internal conflict across the 1990s—12-14 of which experienced shooting and violence at any given time. The U.S. intervened in only 4 (Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo). NEOs don’t count, and were rare in any case.

3. The reports of this conference should be posted on the NIC website in the near future. See [www.cia.gov/nic](http://www.cia.gov/nic).

4. A related effort is the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to track the shipment of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which may have some overlap with the tracking of terrorists at sea.





